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Swim for Fun:
The Importance of Open Swim Programs for Children with Special Needs
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Abstract

Swimming can be a valuable activity for children with special needs, but parents may not feel comfortable taking their child to public pool facilities. The researcher investigated how parents feel about taking their child with special needs to open swim. Members of aquatic organizations were asked how to create a safe swim program that allows children to have their own time to swim. Findings from the interviews and research literature revealed that children with special needs would benefit both physically and socially from having an open swim program tailored to them. An open swim program was developed that provided children with special needs a safe and fun environment, and gave parents a sense of security and comfort when their child participated.

Keywords: special needs, children, open swim, safe

Backstory

When I was in the third grade I became a Girl Scout. Through Girl Scouts, I met a girl named Carla, who quickly became my friend. Carla happened to have a little sister Sandy, who was on the autism spectrum. I spent a lot of time with Sandy as I grew up and became very close with her and her family. When I came home after my sophomore year in college, Sandy's mom asked me if I would consider being a respite care taker for Sandy. At the time I had no idea what respite care was. I accepted the challenge and I did a lot of different things with Sandy over that summer; I helped her learn how to make lists for grocery shopping, took her to speech therapy, and tutored her. I also took her swimming; Sandy loved to go swimming.

About once or twice a week I would take Sandy to open swim at the local swimming pool. It was very difficult to take Sandy swimming. Even though I was always with her, we were not able to go in the deep end because she could not pass a swim test. This meant that we had to stay in the shallow end, which was very crowded. There were children running around and bumping into her. This made Sandy very tense and uncomfortable, and it was also very dangerous. It was dangerous because her balance was not very good so one little bump caused her to fall under the water. The other children did not understand that they needed to be careful around her. Another thing that was difficult with open swim was that Sandy felt uncomfortable being herself. When she would get into the water she would yell really loudly, which drew stares and comments from both parents and swimmers. Sandy was also unable to do the same things that children her own age were able to do. The skills and coordination were not there...yet. It upset me that something that was good for her and that she enjoyed, could also be unsafe and make her upset.

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There are only a handful of pools available in the Monterey Peninsula. There is an even smaller amount of pools that are opened to the general public. Very few places to swim makes public pools very crowded and inaccessible for children with special needs. Children with special needs in this area experience the same challenges of attending swim just like Carla did. Having a pool available just for children with special needs would allow them to experience the water in a way they have not before.

Parents need to be aware of the benefits of the children with special needs participating in aquatics. Swimming is good exercise, and it can be socially and mentally stimulating. Finally, with our community being so close to the water, children with special needs need to be comfortable with being around and in the water.

Literature Review

The Concern

Swimming for children with special needs is very important because it is a form of physical therapy and physical activity. However many parents of children with special needs are not allowing their kids to participate in swimming for various reasons. The main concern is safety. Children with special needs have a higher risk of drowning. Public open swim could be too crowded and not give children with special needs the amount of supervision by lifeguards that they might need. Another concern is parents are not educated about the benefits of swimming for children with special needs.

The Context

Children with special needs can benefit highly from swimming. One way of having children swim and be in the water is open swim. This is a time where pools allow the public to swim. Open swim can be very crowded and loud. Many children with special needs have poor

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balance; being bumped could cause the child to fall under the water, which could be very dangerous. Open swim could also be very loud and overly stimulating for a child with special needs. The over stimulation would cause the child to become very upset and to not want to participate. These reasons are why I want create a program where children with special needs can go to a pool just for them. This would allow for their safety and happiness to be the main focus.

The Stakeholders

This project benefits from interviewing people who work with organizations that help children with special needs participate in swimming and other aquatic activities. The parents of the children with special needs are also important to interview because they are the ones deciding whether or not to allow their child to participate in open swim and other aquatics programs.

While exploring research on children with special needs and swimming, I have come across three claims that support my project. The first claim is children with special needs benefit from aquatic therapy. The second claim is that aquatic activities can improve children with special needs social skills. My final claim is that water safety is of utmost importance for children with special needs.

Aquatic Therapy

Aquatic therapy is treatment and exercise in water. The therapy can be for physical activity, physical therapy, or for calming relaxation. The author of a journal, Waters (2008), describes water therapy as “prescribed by a physician and supervised by a licensed physical therapist. While it can be enjoyable, it is far more structured than aquatic exercise” (p. 2). She claims that aquatic therapy is very beneficial for children with special needs and can be an enjoyable experience as well. (Waters, 2008). Children with special needs are able to move in water in a way that they cannot on land.

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Aquatics therapy can help children with specific disorders. Pan (2011) explored how implementing aquatics programs can help children with autism spectrum disorder, predicting that aquatic therapy would help these children with physical and motor skills. Findings revealed that both children with and without autism saw an increase in repetitions and flexibility (Pan, 2011). This study proved that aquatics therapy is beneficial for all children.

Some forms of aquatic therapy are unconventional. In another study on aquatic therapy, MdYusof and Chia (2012) predicted that even though unconventional, dolphin therapy would improve the cognitive abilities and physical skills of children with Autism. Dolphin therapy consisted of children with special needs being able to ride and interact with dolphins. According to the researchers, the dolphin therapy helped the children “become more socially aware of themselves, beginning with the somatic awareness of their hands (e.g., performing a hand signal to get the dolphin to respond back) and legs (e.g., waddling their legs in the pool)” (MdYusof, & Chia, 2012, p. 57). The children were unaware that they were participating in aquatic therapy, but they were able to improve somatic awareness that will benefit them for their entire lives. Somatic awareness is the ability to learn your body emotionally. This research suggests that children with special needs can benefit from aquatic therapy even if the therapy is unconventional or involves animals.

Children with Special Needs and Social Skills

Swimming and different forms of aquatic therapy help children not only physically and mentally but socially. Children with special needs are often separated from their peers and have difficulty communicating properly with their peers and family members. Chu and Pan (2012) conducted a study to see if children with special needs learned and improved aquatic skills better with sibling instruction, peer instruction, or alone. The twenty-one children with autism who

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participated in this study had great success when completing an aquatic skill with a peer or sibling because they were able to work with their peers instead of being separated like they are in school (Chu, & Pan, 2012). These children with autism were able to learn important social skills such as when to give a hug appropriately and how to communicate with someone their own age (Chu, & Pan, C. 2012). Many children with autism struggle demonstrating proper social skills. This study proved that it is not impossible to teach children with autism social skills. Sometimes it just takes creative instruction like aquatic therapy to help teach and instill social skills.

In another study, Fragal-Pinkam and colleagues (Fragal-Pinkam, Haley, & O'Neill, 2008) explored how aquatics therapy can help children with special needs learn social skills. They found that the children not only improved their physical abilities and learned new aquatic skills but also learned social skills (Fragal-Pinkam et al., 2008). The researcher stated that “children were encouraged to model their strengths and assist other children in learning swimming techniques or social participation and communication skills” (Fragal-Pinkam et al., 2008, pg. 7). Children who participated in relay races were able to learn good sportsmanship and how to interact with their teammates (Fragala-Pinkham, et al., 2008, pg.7). These are life lessons that many children learn through sports. Aquatics programs are a good way for children with special needs learn these life lessons because they are low-impact exercises which allow children with physical disabilities to participate.

Social skills can be taught during typical swim lessons. Pan (2010) explored the effectiveness of an aquatics program that not only taught them swimming skills but also taught them how to improve their social behaviors. Children with autism, ages six to nine were selected to participate in the ten week study. Half of the children were in a group that learned only swimming skills through individual instruction and the other half were in a group that learned

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swimming skills together with social skills (Pan, 2010). The researchers found a large decrease in anti-social behaviors for the children that participated in the group that learned swimming skills together with social skills. The way that the study tried to improve anti-social behaviors were “facilitating sharing exchanges, encouraging children to seek assistance from each other, facilitating interactions during transitions and during group games and activities, addressing the proper etiquette, lining up for a turn, and even non-instructional socialization.” (Pan, 2010, pg. 25). The anti-social behavior decreased because the instructors required the children with autism to interact with each other rather than being instructed individually with very little peer interaction.

Water Safety

Water safety is a major issue when it comes to children with special needs being near any type of water. Children with special needs have a higher number of drowning and near drowning incidents compared to children who do not have special needs. With that being said that does not mean children with special needs should not swim, it just means parents and other adults need to be more aware when a child with special needs is swimming and have rules in place. The claim is that with proper safety precautions in place children with special needs will have a safe time swimming. Grosse (2008) suggests that it is the parents’ job to make sure that children are aware of pool rules and children with special needs should have a lifetime rule about water. Grosse (2008) states this rule as “he or she should not enter the water until given permission to do so. Children must learn to wait before engaging in aquatic activity. This helps keep them from getting into aquatic danger when an adult is not present or ready to supervise them.” (71). Rules and guidelines are essential for keeping children with special needs safe while in and around water.

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How a parent perceives their child's swimming abilities can also result in how much supervision a child with special needs receives while in or near the water. The study investigated parents' opinions on their child's swimming ability change once they are in swim lessons. The study had children age²s two to five participate in swim lessons for eight months. The results showed that parents would supervise their child less or not at all while near water because they believed their child was accumulating swim skills (Morrongiello et al., 2014). No matter what a child's swimming ability a child should be monitored while swimming by an adult at all times. (Morrongiello et al., 2014). Proper supervision should always be taken place when watching a child with special needs swim. Knowing how to swim should not completely eliminate a child's supervision.

The National Autism Association conducted a study to determine the how many children with autism died because of drowning. The research found that between 2009 and 2011 twenty children with Autism drowned. (McIlwain, et al., 2012). The authors attributed this to the tendency for children with Autism are interested by water because "although no clinical reasoning exists to explain water attraction in ASD, many theorize that sensory input may play a role-" (McIlwain, et al., 2012, 7). Parents should be aware that children with Autism are attracted to water. They should not ban them from being around water but make sure that they know how to swim and ensure that their child is supervised at all times when around water. Not being able to be in or around water will only want the child to explore the water even more.

In the literature that was found researchers came to conclusions that strongly supported the idea that children with special needs benefit from aquatic programs. Children benefited from aquatics therapy because they were able to receive physical activity as well as develop better flexibility and body awareness. The research are also supported the idea that aquatics programs

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help children with special needs develop social skills. Finally the research confirmed that water safety is very important and proper water safety education can prevent major accidents from occurring.

Method

Monterey, California is just a few miles away from the Pacific Ocean. The Monterey Peninsula is home to more than twenty swimming pools. I have observed children with Autism who are very attracted to water. They will wonder off from a group to go touch and be in the water. I believe that they enjoy touching and being in the water. I have also observed children with Autism and other disabilities benefit from water therapy. I have talked to fellow swim instructors that say water therapy helps the children with muscle movement. Children with special needs often do not go to the pool. Parents do not let their children attend open swim at public pools. In order to investigate this issue, I will interview parents and directors of programs for children with special needs to learn how to develop an open swim program that children with special needs will attend and enjoy.

Research Question

Why do parents of children with special needs feel comfortable or not comfortable allowing their child to participate in open swim? What are organizations doing to help children with special needs develop aquatic skills? What are their opinions on water safety issues for children with special needs?

Action Project Significance/Need

In order to answer my research question I will interview people who play a significant role (founders, board members) in organizations that help children with special needs. After

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interviewing these board members I will use what I learned to contact parents and to develop an open swim program. This is important because it will inform me on what organizations are doing to help children with special needs in regards to swimming.

Action Project Benefits

Children with special needs will be able to participate in open swim that is just for them which is never the case. Children will be able to have fun swimming and interacting with other children while parents will be able to have the peace of mind that their children will be in a safe and positive environment.

Procedures

I will be contacting the Monterey California branch of Special Olympics in Monterey California. Special Olympics helps children who have physical and mental disabilities participate in sports. This program makes sports accessible for children with disabilities. Special Olympics organization has a very popular and well-established aquatics program that teaches swim lessons to children with special needs. The organization also holds swim meets so that kids can experience competition.

Participants

Researcher. This project is personally meaningful to me because I tried to take a child with special needs to open swim and it was very difficult and stressful. She was getting bumped into constantly and I had to be with her at all times to make sure she was safe and comfortable. I want to do this project so that children with special needs and their parents can enjoy being at the pool.

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I have many skills that help qualify me to carry out this project. I have been swimming and playing water polo for over twelve years. I also have been a lifeguard for seven years. I have been around children who have special needs since I was eight years old and have been doing respite care and teaching swim lessons for the past seven years. I also have had a personal experience with the challenges and struggles that can arise when taking children with special needs to open swim.

One thing that makes me different from my subjects is that I do not have special needs and I am not between the ages of five to twelve. I also could have difficulties convincing the parents to participate and for them to trust me with their children. This could be because of my age, education, and lack of experience with this project.

Study participants. The participants will be parents of both girls' and boys' age's five to twelve who have cognitive and physical disabilities. These children will mostly be residents of the Monterey peninsula. The children's race and socioeconomic status could both vary. These parents will be interviewed after their child participated in the action project. The survey will be able to get their perspectives about their children participating in open swim and what they thought of the action project that their child had just participated in. Their answers to the questions are very relevant because they have a direct and personal connection to the issue and the action project.

The participants in the interviews will also be people who are members of organizations that help children with special needs. One of the individuals being interviewed will be referred by the initials S.V. S.V. is a board member for an organization called Ride-A-Wave. This organization helps create an adaptive ocean experience for children with special needs. S.V. has a direct responsibility in the boogie board program. She sets up events as well as organizes and

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trains volunteers. S.V. has been teaching swim lessons for the past forty years. She began teaching swim lessons to children with special needs when she was fourteen years old. S.V is the aquatics director at CSUMB. She is in charge of who is at the pool as well as who works at the pool. She is also a trained lifeguard and is certified in training other lifeguards.

The other person that will be interviewed will go by the initials D.P. She is a board member for TOP soccer which is a nationwide soccer program for children with special needs. She helps to train other soccer coaches. She is also an important volunteer with Special Olympics of the Monterey Peninsula. Special Olympics is an organization that gives athletic opportunities for children with special needs. She helps coordinate events and is in charge of getting volunteers to participate. D.P. also teaches swim lessons for the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District. During the week the children in the MPUSD special education programs are transported to a local pool and are taught how to swim. D.P. teaches swim lessons and helps monitor and train the other instructors. D.P. has been swimming for over fifteen years.

I, Sarah Lowes, will make contact the adaptive P.E. teacher for MPUSD. I will ask the teacher to pass out flyers. The flyer will have a website for parents to register their child. I will then make contact with the parents through e-mail. If I do not hear a response after 4-5 days I will send a follow up e-mail. If I still do not get a response I will ask the Ride-A-Wave organization to pass out flyers.

There is a large risk in participating in this study. The risk is associated with the children participating and the risk factors associated with having events at a pool. The main risk is drowning or major injury from running around the pool deck as well as diving in shallow water, there is very minimal risk for parents who choose to answer the questionnaire. The main risk is offending parents or making them feel uncomfortable by the questions that are being asked.

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That safeguards that will be put into place will be one on one supervision. Every child will have a volunteer in the water with them. Children will also only be in the shallow end of the pool.

There will also be a minimum of two trained lifeguards on the pool deck at all times.

Instruments and Equipment

Interviews will be conducted with two sets of stakeholders. The first set of stakeholders will be coordinators or board members of organizations that help children who have special needs be able to participate in aquatic activities. I want to ask these stakeholders what they are doing to help children with special needs in aquatics and I want to know how they feel about children with special needs participating in open swim (For interview questions see Appendix A).

The second set of stakeholders are parents who have children with special needs between the ages of five to twelve. The parents will be given a survey after the action project. I want to ask these parents their opinions on having their child attend open swim and what they think is a safe place for their child to swim. These parents will be able to give a first-hand experience and opinion of this issue (For interview questions see Appendix B).

In order to conduct my interviews I will need an audio recorder or my phone to be able to record the interviews. I will also have a paper with the questions I will ask printed out.

Interview procedure. All interviews will be done individually. The interviews will ideally be face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews will be no more than one hour long. The interviews will be audio recorded if the interviewee consents for this to happen. I will interview the stakeholders at a location and time that is most convenient for them. This could be at their workplace or another quiet location that is convenient for them. Both groups of individuals who

SWIM FOR FUN

are being interviewed will be given consent forms to read and sign before the interviews begin.

The parents will be given the consent form found in Appendix C and the organization members will be given the consent form in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

All interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed, and analysis will be done using the LeCompte qualitative data analysis approach (LeCompte, 2000). First the interviews will be organized based off of the two types of groups that were interviewed. Summaries of each answer from the interviews will be placed into a spreadsheet onto the computer. Both groups of interview data will be categorized into how the interviewees responded. Categories would be based on if an interviewee agreed with the question or not. Then sub-categories would be created grouping the similar reasons for why an interviewee agreed with the question or not. Categories could also be created for similar opinions and or solutions. Patterns will be found and connected. The parents and stakeholders will begin in different groups but the analysis could show that the two groups could have similar opinions and the data could connect (LeCompte, 2000).

Results

Interviews

The two individuals that were interviewed have a combined fifty years of experience working with children with special needs in the aquatics field. They also have a combined twelve years of experience with as a board member in an organization. Both of these interviewees expressed concerns and benefits about having children with special needs participate in an open swim program. There were three emergent themes that were very obvious during these

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interviews. Quotes and all of the emergent themes can be seen in the table in Appendix E. The three emergent themes were inclusion, safety, and physical/social benefits. These emergent themes were talked about by the interviewees constantly. One or more of these themes were discussed with every answer that the interviewee gave.

The interviewees agreed that water is a great form of physical therapy which supports the claims that I previously discussed in my literature review. The interviewees also discussed how open swim can be a way for children to socially interact with others and improve their social skills. Which supports another claim that I made in my literature review. The final claim that was supported was that safety is a huge concern when children with special needs are in or around the water. However my claim never brought up the importance of water safety for all kids but, my interviewees discussed water safety for children of all abilities quite frequently.

Inclusion

When S.V. was asked about water safety for children with special needs she responded with a simple answer, “kids are kids.” (See Appendix E) This is such a simple answer for such a serious topic. S.V. did not deny that children with special needs have different challenges than children who do not have special needs. She is aware that some children with special needs have very poor balance and cannot be bumped into. Or that some children with Autism are very sensitive to loud noises. She was very aware that children with special needs have challenges in and out of the water. But the main point that S.V. and D.P. wanted to make was no matter the age or ability children need to be constantly observed in and around water.

There was one question that slightly went against this emergent theme. I found a fact when researching my claims that I wanted to ask my interviewees. I asked them “90% of deaths

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of children with autism are from drowning. What is your opinion on this fact? Do you think parents and the community are aware of this?” both S.V. and D.P. were shocked by this fact (See Appendix E). Both of them believed that parents and the community were not aware that children with autism are attracted to water. They also do not think that parents and the community are aware that children with autism are notorious for wondering off. D.P. did not think this separated a child with Autism from any other child. She mentioned how if parents knew their child was attracted to water they would monitor their child more closely. The fact that a child has Autism is irrelevant. Parents need to know their kid.

The claims that I researched only focused on the safety and focus of children with special needs. The research never discussed how children should be monitored while in the water no matter their ability.

Safety

The safety of children in water is very important. Drowning is always a very serious safety concern but it is not the only concern. D.P. mentioned that open swim is a concern for children with special needs because other children are not aware that they cannot bump into the child with special needs because their balance is not very good. Many pools are also not wheel chair accessible. This makes it very difficult for children who use a wheel chair or walker to enter the pool.

Both D.P. and S.V. gave safety suggestions that their organizations use when they take children with special needs into the pool or the ocean. They said that they always make sure that there is a one to one ratio for child and volunteer (See Appendix E). Another safety tip that they gave is that they never let the child out of sight and they do not let a child even enter deep water

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unless they know the child can swim. D.P. and S.V. also said that their organizations always have lifeguards on hand (See Appendix E). They also train the lifeguards and volunteers in how to interact with the children and what to do if there is an emergency. S.V.'s organization takes children with special needs kayaking and surfing in the Pacific Ocean. She says that they have never had a major incident because their volunteers are very alert and are aware that safety is a major concern.

Physical/Social Benefits

When asked if children with special needs would benefit from an open swim program tailored just for them, the answer was an overwhelming yes by both interviewees (See Appendix E). They stated that water is an amazing medium for children with special needs to play in. D.P. talked about water is a great form of physical therapy. It helps children who have stiff joints or who have difficulties walking outside the water. S.V. also stated that water really intrigues children on a sensory level. The feeling of the water on their hands or the way that they are lighter in the water really intrigues children with special needs. Especially children with Autism.

As S.V. introduced, social skills are also being developed. Children with special needs are able to interact with their peers outside of a school setting. The children are able to play games and solve conflicts. They learn that if they yell it can upset their friend and that yelling is not something they want to do. The children also learn how to follow directions and rules that are set by the volunteers and the life guards.

The development of social skills was also discussed as one of my claims. There were numerous articles that said water therapy and other aquatic activities helped teach children social skills as well as sportsmanship.

Interview Conclusion

D.P. and S.V. gave great insight into an opinion of someone who works with children with special needs in an aquatic environment. D.P. and S.V brought up important emergent themes (See Appendix E) as well as ideas of what to do for my action project and who to contact for assistance. D.P. built my confidence in my action project when she said “I really hope this works. The kids and the community needs it.”

Action Project

Identification and Evaluation of Action Project

Focus Issue: The main concern is that parents of children with special needs do not regularly take their child to open swim or other aquatic programs. This is a concern since children with special needs benefit physically and socially from participating in aquatics. Why parents do not take their child participate in aquatic activities could be for various reasons. These reasons could be safety concerns for the child, cost, and not enough aquatic opportunities in the area.

Action Options: One option for a solution to the focus issue would be to have the pool at California State University of Monterey Bay opened for a day just for children with special needs. The pool would be opened for two hours for children just with special needs to enjoy the water any way they would like. The children would have one on one supervision in the water as well as certified lifeguards outside of the water to ensure safety. The aquatics director of the pool at CSUMB is named S.V. and is one of the board members that was interviewed. She is willing to close the pool just for this solution. She also will the solution to occur for free and provide

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certified lifeguards. The flyer that will be passed out for this solution can be seen in Appendix F. The flyers will be passed out to school districts and organizations that help children with special needs and their families living in the Monterey Peninsula.

A second option for a solution would be to have an aquatics program tailored just for children with special needs. The solution would also be at California State University of Monterey Bay's pool. S.V. has also offered the pool as available for this solution. This aquatic program would be a more frequent program than option one. The pool would be open a minimum of twice a month for open swim activities. The program would also offer swim lessons for children with special needs once a week. The program would have trained swim instructors in the water as well as certified life guards on the pool deck. The ratio for swim lessons would be no more than two children to one instructor. A similar flyer to the one in Appendix F would be passed out to schools and organizations that help children with special needs. The flyers would reach children on the Monterey Peninsula.

The third and final option for a solution would be to open an aquatics facility that is tailored to children with special needs. The pool would help children with special needs in the Monterey Peninsula. The pool would be opened to the general public occasionally. The pool would be indoors and heated. The pool would also be shallow with walls that have railings that the children could hold onto. Another feature that the aquatics facility would have would be ramps, wheel chair lifts, and wide stairs to help children access the pool. The facility would have aquatic therapy classes as well as swim lessons. The pool would also have open swim for children with special needs. All staff would be trained and certified.

Evaluation of Action Options: All of the options are possible solutions. The solutions were evaluated based on four criteria's. The four evaluation criteria's were cost, time, impact,

SWIM FOR FUN

and research. The criteria was applied to the three solutions. The grading for the criteria's had three levels. These levels were low, medium, and high. This grading determined how the criteria and the solution were connected. The table with the solutions and the criteria will be in Appendix G. Solution one has a low cost because the solution is relying on volunteers and the pool being rented for free. There will be small costs in printing out flyers and purchasing inner tubes and other pool toys. Time was also given a grade of low because the activity will only be for two hours for one day. The solution was given a high grade for the solution supporting the research. The solution scored a medium grade for possibility of impact. The activity will only be for one day. There will be a positive impact on the children for one day but they will not be able to continue to have this positive experience.

The second solution was graded on the same scale and evaluation criteria's. The grade for cost was a medium. Allowing the pool to be closed to the general public would cost the pool money. Having lifeguards also costs money. These costs could cause the pool to lose money or eventually not allow the pool to be rented for free. Time was given a high score because this solution will occur frequently over a long period of time. This solution will require a lot of pool time as well as volunteer time. The research highly supported this solution. The impact probability was also high. Children will be getting regular aquatic activity as well as learning how to swim. The children will also be able to have and develop social interactions with other children.

The third solution had a high rating for cost. Building a pool from the ground up costs a lot of money. Time also received a high rating. It will take a long time to build a pool. The programs will also be frequent and it will take a long time to see results in children who participate in the swim lesson and aquatic therapy programs. The support through research and

SWIM FOR FUN

interviews is also high. The possibility of impact level is high. Children with special needs will have an aquatic facility tailored for them that they can use regularly and over time.

Evaluation of Evidence: In the interview with D.P. she stated that the ultimate solution would be a pool that would be just for children with special needs. This statement supports option 3. The research from the literature section also supports the idea that children would benefit from aquatics therapy. The research supports options 2 and 3. Both options allow children to learn how to swim. This is great therapy for the children's joints. Option 3 also allows for children to participate in aquatics therapy. The research and the interviewees stated that aquatic therapy is a great low impact therapy for children with special needs. All of the options support the research that aquatics help social interactions. The research from the literature review studied how children learn social skills by interacting with children and instructors in the pool. The children learn rules as well as sportsmanship. The children learn how to cheer for their friends when they complete a task. The children also learn how to wait their turn when they are waiting for a water toy or to participate in a task. Also all of the options support the interviewees' main concern and focus. Both S.V. and D.P. talked about how their organizations main focus is safety. Both talked about how the water can be dangerous and that children must be supervised. All of these options will be very safe. All of the options require small instructor to child ratios. The three options also have certified lifeguards on the pool deck at all times.

Decision Making

Recommendations: After evaluating and deciding my options for a solution I advocate for option 1 to be implemented. This option would implement an open swim program at CSUMB's pool for one day for two hours.

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Influence of context and assumptions: Time and cost were the main factors that influenced my recommendation. Options 2 and 3 are meant to be implemented over a long period of time. Option 1 takes a very short time to implement since it is only for one day. Option 1 also will make it easier to find volunteers. It is easier to find volunteers for one day then for multiple days a week or month. Cost was also a main factor. Option 1 has the lowest cost of the three options.

I am assuming that option 1 will be the best recommendation based on the amount of time and money that I have. I am also assuming that I would get more participants if I offered a free open swim program. Based on my implication I am assuming that options 2 and 3 would cost a lot of money. I am also assuming that it would take a lot of time to find volunteers to commit to options 2 and 3 because the volunteers would have to commit to more than one day of volunteering.

Position

Concession: One strength of option 3 is that there would be an aquatics facility for children with special needs in the Monterey Peninsula. There is nothing in the Monterey Peninsula area like the pool that would be created in option 3.

Limitations: My position is limited because I am assuming that parents would approve of an open swim program for children with special needs. I am also assuming that children would have an enjoyable time at the event. I do not have a parents perspective on what would be the best option for a solution to my focus issue.

Potential negative outcome: One potential negative outcome of my recommendation is that the children would not be able to have another opportunity participating in this option if they

SWIM FOR FUN

enjoyed or benefitted from it. This is a one day activity and there are not any other similar options in the community. The child would not be able to go to an open swim program just for children with special needs again.

Conclusions and related outcomes: Even though there are some concessions and limitations I still support my recommendation. This is because this is the option that will be able to help the most children in the amount of time that is available. Children with special needs will be able to feel special for a day. This option will allow children to have an opportunity to play in the water that they may not have had before. This is also a solution that will ensure safety while the children are in the pool. The main priority is safety and this option will ensure the children are safe.

Description

For my action project I created an event titled Swim for Fun. This was an event that allowed children age's five to twelve with special needs to participate in open swim and play in the water however they would like. The children had one on one supervision. There were also two certified lifeguards on the pool deck at all times.

To begin my action project I had to make sure that I had a pool for the children to swim in. I went to the aquatics director at California State University of Monterey Bay if there was a way that I could use the pool for my action project. She was very willing to do whatever was needed to make sure that this event occurred at CSUMB's pool. We came up with a date that the pool was available and a time that would work best for most volunteers and participants. She then had me sign and fill out the proper paper work. She did not charge me for renting the pool and provided lifeguards. She gave me a time slot of four hours.

SWIM FOR FUN

Once I had the pool reserved I created a flyer that could be passed out to special education programs and organizations to get participants. The flyer that was created can be seen in appendix F. On the flyer was the title of the event. The flyer also had a description of the event, the date, location, a link for registration, as well as my contact information. The flyer also had a schedule for the event. There were two sessions that were available. Each session was an hour long and the sessions were on the same day. The parents could sign up their child for either session. To register the parents' used the link that was on the flyer. The parents filled in their child's name, age, and gender. The parents also selected which session they would like to attend. There was also a section for the parent to enter the disability that their child has as well as the parents contact information. I contacted teachers who passed the flyers out to their students who gave these flyers to their parents. I also contacted organizations who sent out the flyer in their weekly newsletter.

After the flyers were passed out I asked my peers to volunteer for this event. I contacted the CSUMB water polo team that I am a member to get volunteers. I also asked classmates if they wanted to volunteer. I had twelve volunteers total. Eleven of these twelve volunteers were members of the CSUMB water polo team. All of the volunteers that were on the water polo team were experienced swimmers as well lifeguard and CPR certified. Two of these volunteers were lifeguards for the pool at CSUMB and volunteered to be the lifeguards on duty for this event.

Reflection

My main objective going into this project was to give children with special needs a safe and fun place to swim. I also wanted to make sure that the children felt special and that their parents felt comfortable allowing their children to swim and be a part of my action project.

SWIM FOR FUN

The day of action project began with the volunteers and I showing up about forty five minutes before the event started. We set up the pool which included inflating inner tubes and making sure the lane lines were set correctly. Then I had a quick information session with the volunteers. We went over safety rules and persuasions. We then went over the schedule for the day and brainstormed game ideas to play with the children. Then about twenty minutes before the first session was to begin I sent out two volunteers to go into the parking lot and help participants with parking and welcome them to the event. The same welcome happened for the second session as well. There were two children that participated in each session. Each child had two volunteers that were matched with them. The child was able to decide what they got to do. One child loved that his volunteer was blowing bubbles. He thought it was so funny. He had his volunteer blow bubbles for almost ten minutes. One girl loved playing with these colored sea horses that sank in the water. She would drop them and have her partner go under water to get them. In the second session there was a boy who had never been in a swimming pool before. He did not want to get his head wet and the volunteers listened to his request and made sure he was very comfortable. He learned how to kick while holding onto a noodle. He also loved playing with the beach balls that were in the water. He sat on the stairs and hit them back to his partner for ten minutes. There was another boy who loved jumping in the pool. He was the last one in the pool and got all of the volunteers that were in the water to jump in the pool with him multiple times. He also enjoyed playing different games with these soft water balls that we had in the pool. During both sessions there were volunteers who took pictures. These pictures can be seen in Appendix H and I.

Each child was able to have a lot of attention given to them because we had a large amount of volunteers and very few children. Each child had a large amount of space in the pool

SWIM FOR FUN

to be able to do whatever they would like. The children were only in the shallow end to make sure that they were safe. There were also two volunteers per child to ensure safety and because there were so many volunteers. Having two volunteers per child worked out well because the child had more people to play with. Three of the four children who participated only swam for about thirty minutes instead of the full hour. This was because their attention span only allowed them to participate for thirty minutes. After thirty minutes they were ready to leave even though they were having a great time. There was one boy however who could have been there all day if his grandparent did not tell him that it was time to go. He was in the water for over an hour. Before each child left they told their volunteers thank you. A couple of volunteers even received hugs.

After the event I interviewed the parents to ask for their opinion about my action project. All of the parents that were interviewed had very positive responses. Many of the parents agreed that there were not many very many places for their child to swim. One mom said that her child is happiest when he is in the water. All the parents that were interviewed said that they would allow their child to attend a program like this again. They also all agreed that being in the water helps their child physically as well as socially.

If I were to do this again I would open up the event to all children with special needs not just children between the ages of five and twelve. Having the age limit limited the amount of participants that I had. Next time I would make this event a more frequent vent rather than a one-time thing. This could make parents more willing to sign their child up if it was more than a one-time thing.

Based on my experience with this project and its outcomes I should stop having an age limit if I do the same thing again. I should let any child participate and get to experience a great

SWIM FOR FUN

time in the water. There could be an older child who has never been in a pool before and I want to keep them away. I should continue to have an open swim event for children with special needs. The kids seemed to really enjoy being able to experience the water in their own way. I would continue to allow children to have a safe fun experience in the water. Based on this experience I should start having a more regular program that includes swim lessons. Not a single one of the children that attended this event knew how to swim. I would have two to four sessions a month and I would teach swim lessons as well as have a time for children to enjoy the water whichever way they would like.

What I learned about my self is that I can plan an event all by myself. It was really exciting to see this event go from an idea to the actual thing. I hope through this event parents will want to take their child swimming more often. I hope that they saw how much fun their child had and would want to have their child continue swimming.

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Appendix A

Organization/Program Director Interview Protocol

1. What do you see as problem with children with special needs participating in open swim?
2. What are you most concerned with when you see children with special needs in or around water?
3. 90% deaths of children with autism are from drowning. What is your opinion on this fact? Do you think parents and the community are aware of this?
4. How does your organization help ensure children's safety while they are in the water?
5. Do you think children with special needs must be monitored by an adult at all times while swimming?
6. Why is it more dangerous for children with special needs to participate in open swim than children who do not have special needs?
7. Are you aware of any swim camps for children with special needs?
8. Do you think children with special needs would benefit from having a pool opened just for them?
9. What do you think the obstacles/drawbacks are of having an open swim just for children with special needs?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to say about children with special needs and aquatics or the improvement of an open swim program for children with special needs?

Appendix B

Parent Interview Protocol

1. How comfortable are you letting your child attend open swim?
2. Why or why aren't you comfortable taking your child to open swim?
3. Do you think swimming would be beneficial for your child?
4. Are there programs or camps that allow your child to go swimming occasionally or regularly?
5. In your mind how can a pool make you comfortable enough to take your child swimming?
6. Are you comfortable leaving your child alone at a pool? Why or why not?
7. Are you comfortable not being in the water with your child while they are in a pool? Why or why not
8. What would have to occur for you to be comfortable not being in the water with your child?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to say about swimming or your child's safety in the pool?

Appendix C

Consent Form for Parents

**CSUMB Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Project: Swim for Fun: The Importance of Open Swim Programs for Children with Special Needs

We would like you to participate in a research study conducted by Sarah Lowes, a student in the Liberal Studies Department, to be used for a capstone project at California State University, Monterey Bay.

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of parent's opinions on swimming and open swim for their child with special needs. Also to gather opinions on how to develop a safe open swim program for children with special needs.

You were selected as a participant in this study because as a parent of a child with special needs your insights into swimming and aquatics would be very beneficial.

The benefits of participating in this project include voicing opinions and concerns about children with special needs in the water as well as helping develop an open swim program that could benefit your child and other children with special needs.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a short interview/fill out a survey. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and should take 30 minutes to complete.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your written or witnessed verbal permission or as required by law. Furthermore, the data collected will only be used by the researcher, who will change all names and identifying information in her capstone paper and presentation. [IF RELEVANT] At the completion of this project, any audio-recorded interviews will be erased and photographs destroyed.

Participating in this project is entirely up to you. You can choose whether or not to be in the study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

If you want to know more about this research project or have questions or concerns, please call me at (425) 829-8662 NUMBER or email me at slowes@csumb.edu or call or email Dr. Deanne Pérez-Granados, of the Liberal Studies Department (Phone: 831-582-4322, Email: dperez-granados@csumb.edu).

The project has been reviewed and accepted by California State University, Monterey Bay. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

If you have questions about CSUMB's rules for research, please call the Committee for Human Subjects Chair, Chip Lenno, CSUMB Technology Support Services, 100 Campus Center, Building. 43, Seaside CA 93955, 831.582.4799.

SWIM FOR FUN

You will get a copy of this consent form. Thank you for considering participation.

Sincerely,

Sarah Lowes

Consent Statement

I understand the procedures described. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I freely agree to participate in this study. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

I have been given a copy of this Consent Form.

Signature

Date

Signature of Researcher

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Consent Form for Organization/Program Directors

**CSUMB Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Project: Swim for Fun: The Importance of Open Swim Programs for Children with Special Needs

We would like you to participate in a research study conducted by Sarah Lowes, a student in the Liberal Studies Department, to be used for a capstone project at California State University, Monterey Bay.

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of Organization members opinions on swimming and open swim for their child with special needs. Also to gather opinions on how to develop a safe open swim program for children with special needs.

You were selected as a participant in this study because you are an important member of a group that helps children with special needs. Your insights into swimming and aquatics would be very beneficial.

The benefits of participating in this project include voicing opinions and concerns about children with special needs in the water as well as helping develop an open swim program that could benefit children with special needs.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a short interview/fill out a survey. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and should take 30-45 minutes to complete.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your written or witnessed verbal permission or as required by law. Furthermore, the data collected will only be used by the researcher, who will change all names and identifying information in her capstone paper and presentation. [IF RELEVANT] At the completion of this project, any audio-recorded interviews will be erased and photographs destroyed.

Participating in this project is entirely up to you. You can choose whether or not to be in the study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

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The project has been reviewed and accepted by California State University, Monterey Bay. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

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SWIM FOR FUN

You will get a copy of this consent form. Thank you for considering participation.

Sincerely,

Sarah Lowes

Consent Statement

I understand the procedures described. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I freely agree to participate in this study. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

I have been given a copy of this Consent Form.

Signature

Date

Signature of Researcher

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix E

Emergent Themes	Important Quotes	Possible Solutions
Water safety is important for any child regardless of ability (Inclusion)	“Wow! That is a very large number. I do not think parents or the community is aware at all.” –D.P.	Educate parents and community on risks and benefits of children with special needs in water
Children with special needs could benefit from a pool just for them	“I really hope this works. The kids and the community needs it.” – D.P.	Make a pool that is just for kids with special needs
Parents and community members are not educated enough about the risk factors of children with Autism near water (Safety/benefits)	“Children should be monitored whether they have special needs or not.” –S.V.	Have a designated time at a pool just for children with special needs
Cost and pool space is a large reason that there is not a program or pool just for children with special needs (Limitations)	“Safety issues are a huge concern. People need to understand challenges.”- S.V.	
Children with special needs really benefit from being in the water. (Physical and social benefits)	“Kids are Kids.”-S.V.	
One to one ratio and rules are key (safety)		

Appendix F

CSUMB Aquatic Center 4113 2nd Ave, Seaside, Ca 93955

CSUMB Aquatic Center welcomes children with special needs, ages 5-12, to spend their day enjoying the water. Swim for Fun provides trained/certified lifeguards and volunteers for 1 to 1 supervision per session. Our goal is to give each participant a safe and fun pool experience! Children will participate in games and be able to enjoy the water in their own personal way.

Please bring a swim suit, towel, goggles, and sunscreen.

Sign up soon space is limited!

Session 1 Check In: 12:40pm

Session 1 Open Swim: 1:00pm- 2:00pm

Session 2 Check In: 1:45pm

Session 2 Open Swim: 2:00pm-3:00pm

Session 3 (if attendance allows) Check-in: 2:40pm

Session 3 Open Swim: 3:00pm-4:00pm

To Register Visit:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1O8kPLEZqM->

[yd3psY0bqULHUw9urf0LSk6xsdYUuEL9E/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1O8kPLEZqM-yd3psY0bqULHUw9urf0LSk6xsdYUuEL9E/edit?usp=sharing)

If you have any questions contact Sarah Lowes at slowes@csumb.edu or (425) 829-8662

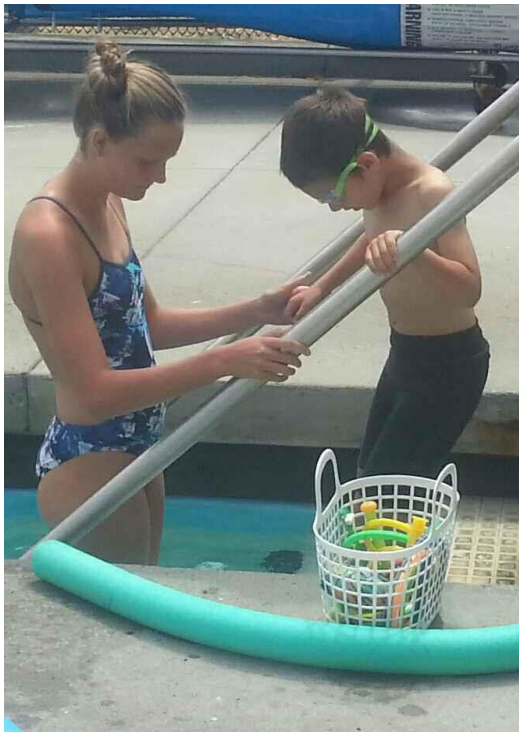
Swim For Fun

Sunday, April 19 2015 1:00-3:00pm

Appendix G

Option	Cost	Time	Research	Impact
Option 1: Open Swim program for children with special needs	Low	Low	High	Medium
Option 2: Monthly open swim and swim lesson program for children with special needs	Medium	High	High	High
Option 3: Creating a pool just for children with special needs	High	High	Medium	High

Appendix H



SWIM FOR FUN



Appendix I



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